

METHODOLOGY AND CRITERIA FOR THE VALIDATION OF EDUCATIONAL AIMS

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The task of establishing educational aims for American public schools is one of the most preplexing problems with which educators are faced today.

Generally speaking, past attempts to deal with the problem of educational aims have been of two kinds. One of these has been devoted primarily to determining the sources from which aims should be derived. Some of the sources which have been proposed are the "major activity fields of society", "the prevailing ideals of a society", "the institutions of a society that have survived", and "the general social currents and cultural trends which may be moving through a society". The other kind of study has been concerned mainly with techniques or procedural mechanics for setting forth aims. Some of the procedures which have been proposed and developed are those of "personal opinion", "consensus", and "expert analysis and judgment".

Common to these previous studies is the assumption that the aims derived from each of the proposed sources and by each of the proposed sets of techniques or procedural mechanics would be valid. An analysis of these studies, however, reveals that implicit in them are differing methodological principles or criteria by which the validity of aims would be established. That is, the standards for judging the validity of proposed educational aims differ from study to study. By one standard the aims judged to be valid would be those based upon the ideals which people believe to be of most importance now. Another standard asserts that valid aims would be those which are adaptations to those universal institutions which have shown their rightness by their ability to survive. Another proclaims that valid aims are those which are representative of the most proficient of present human activities.

It is apparent from the foregoing that previous studies on educational aims do not provide educators with any depend-

able way of knowing which of various proposed aims are valid. Each has proposed a different way of establishing the validity of aims.

I. THE PROBLEM

The practical task with which educators are confronted is that of choosing among the aims which are proposed from time to time by various people and groups, including educators themselves. However, a systematic basis for making sound choices among proposed aims never has been formulated. To set forth, elaborate, and justify a set of self-consistent principles or criteria by which dependable judgments about the validity of proposed educational aims can be made is the problem of the study of which this abstract is a brief statement.

II. THE METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

A. The first step in systematically dealing with any problem is the determination of those things or factors which are significant and relevant for its solution. The determination of these factors for the present study was accomplished by a preliminary examination of the literature from the fields of individual and social psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology and history, logic, political science, and philosophy. This examination revealed that the findings of studies pertaining to (1) the social ideals of a society, (2) the basic needs of people, (3) the possibilities of human development within a society, and (4) the logical aspects of certain significant relationships were especially pertinent for making dependable judgments about the validity of educational aims.

The first set of factors, the social ideals of a society, are significant for making judgments about the validity of aims because they provide a framework or basis for judging the social worth of aims. The worth of educational aims cannot be judged without such a framework.

The second set of factors, the basic needs of people, are

important for making judgments about aims because they provide a basis for determining whether proposed aims will lead to the fulfillment of those conditions which must be satisfied if life itself is to be possible or people are to continue to function and behave in ways which we deem to be human.

The third set of factors, those relating to the growth and development of people, are necessary for making dependable choices among aims because they provide a basis for knowing whether proposed aims are attainable. Without the provision of such a basis the soundness of aims cannot be determined.

The fourth set of factors, those relating to the logic of the problem, are especially pertinent for determining the validity of proposed aims because the way the criteria are to be applied depends upon knowing the formal or logical requirements which dependable judgments must fulfill.

B. Once the significant and relevant factors for the solution of a problem have been determined they can be treated in one or both of two different ways. One way is to inventory and classify them. That is, one may undertake a structural analysis of them. This type of analysis places emphasis upon two things; first upon what elements or things are present in the phenomenon under examination, and second upon discovering what they are in the sense of determining the simpler elements or substances which comprise the elements being studied.

The other way in which the significant and relevant factors can be treated is to discover the way they operate or function within a given phenomenon. That is, a functional analysis may be made of them. This kind of analysis places emphasis upon determining what the significant factors do or how they operate rather than upon what they are.

As the present study was primarily directed toward discovering how the significant and relevant factors operate in making dependable judgments about the validity of proposed educational aims, the analysis undertaken was primarily a

functional one. Simple structural analyses were carried out only to the extent that they were necessary for exemplifying and facilitating the functional analysis.

III. THE FINDINGS

A. In the preceding paragraphs it was indicated that the social ideals of a society provide the necessary standards or value framework for judging the worth of proposed aims. The question which then arises is what ideals shall serve as these standards? The ideals which are chosen must be the basic and dominant ones of the society. That is, they must be the commonly accepted ideals of society which constitute the core of the universals of the culture. Their function is that of integrating and holding the society together.

The findings of the students who have systematically investigated the American culture reveal that the basic and dominant social ideology which operates in the American society is the democratic one. When this ideology is set forth in as explicit and systematic manner as its present development will permit, educators are afforded one basis upon which judgments about the worth of educational aims can be made. Having established this it is possible to formulate one rule for determining the validity of aims. This rule is: if educational aims are to be judged valid, *they must be consistent with the basic and dominant ideology of the American society.*

B. The findings of studies pertaining to the basic needs of people indicate that educational aims which ignore the fulfillment of the basic requirements for life and growth are simply invitations to a primitive form of life, sickness, and death. Specifically, these studies indicate that there are certain basic organic and psychological needs which all humans must fulfill if life and good health are to be realized. A test of the basic and dominant framework for judging the worth of proposed aims is whether it permits and facilitates the fulfillment of these needs. That is, the validity of the democratic ideology itself is determined by whether it provides

for the meeting of these needs. It is because upon examination it does meet this test that a set of self-consistent rules for judging the validity of aims is possible.

As outlined and ordered by professional workers, these basic needs common to all people provide another basis upon which educators can judge the validity of aims. We, therefore, can set forth another rule or criterion. If proposed educational aims are to be judged valid, *they must be compatible with and lead to the fulfillment of the basic human needs as described by science.*

C. The scientific studies on human development reveal the level of proficiency at which the general and specific motor, mental, and emotional behaviors are attainable at given levels of maturation and under certain sets of conditions that can be provided by a culture or society. As provided by professional workers in the field of human development, the findings of these studies provide a basis for determining the soundness of proposed aims. It is true, of course, that scientific findings on human development are not complete, but to the extent that they are available proposed educational aims must be grounded in them if they are to be judged sound. In view of this a third rule for judging the validity of aims becomes possible. This criterion or rule is that if educational aims are to be judged valid, *they must propose the development of behavior which scientific studies show to be possible or attainable at various levels of maturation under the conditions which can be provided by the American culture.*

D. A logical analysis of the formal relationships involved in establishing educational aims reveals that there are three sets of relationships which are significant for making dependable judgments about the validity of proposed aims. First, there are those relationships which exist between proposed aims and the democratic ideals. Second, there are those relationships which exist among the aims themselves. Third, there are the relationships which hold between aims and the conditions which provide the means for their realization.

The formal relationships which are possible between the democratic ideals and proposed aims are of three kinds, *viz.*, logical consistency, logical neutrality, and logical inconsistency. To be judged valid aims may be logically consistent or logically neutral with the democratic ideals, but they cannot be logically inconsistent with them. In other words, for proposed aims to be accepted as valid, *the formal relationships which hold between them and the democratic ideals must fulfill the logical requirement of non-contradiction.*

The same formal relationships that are possible between the democratic ideals and aims are possible also among a group of aims. Just as the formal relationships which hold between the democratic ideals and aims must fulfill the logical requirement of non-contradiction, so must the formal relationships which hold among a group of aims fulfill this requirement. That is, to be judged valid the different aims of a group may be logically consistent or logically neutral with one another, but *they must not be logically inconsistent.*

Between proposed aims and the means to be used for their attainment there are two possible formal relationships, those of logical consistency and inconsistency. Stated otherwise, the means for realizing proposed aims either do or do not lead to the attainment of the aims. When they do, the means-ends relationship may be said to be one of strict implication. If we wish to avoid the establishment of aims which are confined to the realm of "wish", the proposed ends must be the logical consequents of the conditions which act as the means for their realization. This means that means and ends must be logically consistent with one another. In brief, the logical requirement which the means-ends relationship must fulfill is that of *strict-implication.*

IV. CONCLUSIONS

As a way of clarifying the meaning of the criteria and at the same time indicating what is involved in the job of applying them, an attempt was made to determine the validity of

a number of aims included among a group of objectives set forth for the public schools of St. Louis in 1941.* This group of objectives was formulated with the explicit recognition that the social and cultural context within which educational aims will be proposed and realized is the American one, that the democratic way of life is the preferred one.

While the St. Louis objectives represent the combined deliberative efforts of professional educators and St. Louis citizens, and while they were thought to be valid, it was discovered upon application of the criteria to them that they did not fulfill the requirements laid down by the criteria. From this it can be concluded that in a rapidly changing society which contains many conflicting cultural elements the task of choosing aims is an extremely difficult one. In this kind of cultural setting professional educators as well as laymen are likely to hold conflicting sets of ideals. This means that if incompatible ends and the conflict and confusion which ensues from accepting them are to be avoided, educational aims cannot be chosen without reference to an explicitly recognized set of self-consistent standards which stipulate the basic requirements for aims which lead to social and personal integration. In brief, the making of choices among the proposed aims of education for American public schools must be undertaken in a systematic manner that makes possible the examination of aims for their attainability, for their fulfillment of the basic organic and psychological requirements of life, for their consistency with one another, and for their consistency with the basic and common ideals which integrate life in American society.

*St. Louis Public Schools. **The Purposes of Education in the Public Schools of St. Louis.** St. Louis: Division of Curriculum and Instruction, 1941.

VITA

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